

AMENDMENTS TO CLAIMS:

Please cancel Claims 3-5 without prejudice or disclaimer of subject matter.

Please amend Claims 1 and 9 and add Claim 14 as follows. Note that all the claims currently pending in this application, including those not presently amended, have been reproduced below for the Examiner's convenience.

1. (Currently Amended) A sheet processing apparatus, comprising:

sheet conveying means for conveying sheets;

first loading means for loading a sheet bundle comprising a plurality of sheets conveyed by the sheet conveying means;

lateral aligning means for aligning the opposite side edges of the sheet bundle loaded on the first loading means in ~~the~~ a direction perpendicular to ~~the~~ a sheet conveying direction;

stapling means for performing a stapling treatment with respect to a sheet bundle aligned by the lateral alignment means;

sheet bundle conveying means for conveying a sheet bundle stapled by the stapling means;

second loading means for loading sheet bundles conveyed by the sheet bundle conveying means; and

loading position control means for loading sheet bundles to be loaded onto the second loading means so that the loading positions thereof are displaced from each other along the sheet conveying direction by switching timing when the first and second alignment members move to the respective retreat positions, for each sheet bundle.

2. (Original) The sheet processing apparatus according to Claim 1, wherein the second loading means is disposed below the first loading means.

3 - 5. (Canceled)

6. (Original) The sheet processing apparatus according to Claim 1, wherein the loading position control means displaces the loading positions of sheet bundles to be loaded onto the second loading means from each other along the sheet conveying direction, in order to prevent the stapling positions of the sheet bundles from being superimposed on each other.

7. (Original) The sheet processing apparatus according to Claim 1, further comprising longitudinal alignment means for aligning a sheet bundle loaded on the first loading means in the sheet conveying direction.

8. (Original) The sheet processing apparatus according to Claim 7, further comprising sheet hold-down means for holding down a sheet bundle loaded on the first loading means and aligned by the lateral alignment means and the longitudinal alignment means.

9. (Currently Amended) The sheet processing apparatus according to Claim 1, wherein the sheet conveying means and the sheet bundle conveying means are driven by ~~the~~ a same driving source.

10. (Original) The sheet processing apparatus according to Claim 9, wherein the sheet bundle conveying means is a pair of rollers comprising an upper roller and a lower roller, and wherein the sheet bundle conveying means can be switched between separation and nipping.

11. (Original) The sheet processing apparatus according to Claim 10, wherein the upper roller and the lower roller are nipped when a first sheet is loaded onto the first loading means, and wherein the upper roller and the lower roller are separated when second and later sheets are loaded onto the first loading means.

12. (Original) The sheet processing apparatus according to Claim 10, wherein the upper roller and the lower roller are arranged in a staggered configuration.

13. (Original) The sheet processing apparatus according to Claim 1, further comprising full load detecting means for detecting the full load state of sheet bundles on the second loading means.

14. (New) A sheet processing apparatus, comprising:

- sheet conveying means for conveying sheets;
- first loading means for loading a sheet bundle comprising a plurality of sheets conveyed by the sheet conveying means;
- lateral aligning means for aligning an opposite side edges of the sheet bundle loaded on the first loading means in a direction perpendicular to a sheet conveying direction;
- stapling means for performing a stapling treatment with respect to a sheet bundle aligned by the lateral alignment means;
- sheet bundle conveying means for conveying a sheet bundle stapled by the stapling means;
- second loading means for loading sheet bundles conveyed by the sheet bundle conveying means; and
- loading position control means for loading sheet bundles to be loaded onto the second loading means so that the loading positions thereof are displaced from each other along the sheet conveying direction by switching a speed at which the sheet bundle conveying means conveys a sheet bundle, for each sheet bundle.